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Patriotism, allegiance & the nation state

by Andrew Roberts

On loyalty and treachery, and the value of Patriotism.

Might I take you back to at the meeting of the Literary Club on the evening of Friday, April 7, 1775, which we know from Boswell's *Life of Johnson* took place in a tavern amongst "numerous company"? Other than Dr. Samuel Johnson, the other people we know to have been present were Johnson's friends Bennet Langton and the aristocrat Topham Beauclerk, as well as Sir Joshua Reynolds and Edward Gibbon. After discussing Addison's supposed lack of grasp of Italian, the non-appearances of wolves in the poems of Ossian, the differences between the Irish and Erse languages, and the effect of singing the ballad of "*Lilliburlero*" on the Glorious Revolution, the conversation got around to the subject of Patriotism. In one of his most famous remarks, Johnson "suddenly uttered, in a strong determined tone," the statement: "Patriotism is the last refuge of a...

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